

10-8-2018

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Recommended Citation

Botello, Camille, "Cleaning up the Kitchen" (2018). *2018-19 Field Notes*. Essay. Submission 9.
https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/intl_fieldnotes_1819/9

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Chillan, Chile

October 8, 2018

Cleaning up the Kitchen

While cleaning up the kitchen after a classic Chilean *asado* (BBQ), my host mom Claudia Parilo and I started talking about everything from her childhood to her house decor. It was one of the first times I felt like a real part of the family, because of how personal the conversation became. I don't even remember exactly how it came up, but she started talking about her young adult life which was so much more different than mine has been so far. She spent a part of her early childhood in the incredible city of Punta Arenas, which is in Chile's southernmost Patagonia region, and then moved north here to Chillán. Upon her graduation of high school, she took an accelerated dental hygienist course, and shortly after, at only 21 years old, got married. She told me she moved straight out of her childhood home to her husband's house. At 22 she had her first *guagua* (baby), Gabriel, who's 27 years old now, and then had José Miguel (25), Diego (20) and Pedro (15). She never ended up working as a dental hygienist because she was always so busy with the kids, but she told me that she believes one of her life's purposes was to be a mom, specifically a young mom, to all of her boys and that she wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

The whole time she was telling this story, I thought to myself: what a beautiful sentiment. I mean this woman dedicated the entirety of her life, starting early in her 20s, to having and raising her kids. But it's also something I have never really considered doing with my life personally. I'm almost 21 now, single and not really looking honestly, and not even thinking about considering the marriage and baby thing until I'm like 30. It's very interesting hearing

Claudia's story and thinking about my own life; I mean she was my age when she was getting married. And I don't know if the difference in lifestyle is cultural, or if it's generational, or if it's simple personal preference, but I do know that even though we agree to disagree with it, I respect her now more than I already did.

Chilean culture is obviously different from that of rural Idaho or Linfield, but I made a promise to myself before I came here that I would spend more time focusing on the similarities than the differences because I think once we all realize that most people are just trying to live their lives the very best they can, the world will be a much kinder and unified place. My takeaway from our conversation was first and foremost about our different perspectives on the particular *tema* (topic) at hand, but the more I thought about it, the more I appreciated her even trusting me or liking me enough to share her story. I ultimately feel closer to her because of it, and I think that's the point of this whole experience.